

## CLIMATIC TREATMENT OF HYPOCHONDRIASIS

Among the diseases in which change of air is most frequently resorted to, there is none in which its beneficial influence is more manifest than in hypochondriasis, an affection so closely connected with morbid states of both the stomach and brain, that it is as frequently ascribed to one organ as to the other. But be its seat what it may matters little to the purpose of this work, since these viscera are so directly associated together that whatever affects either must react on both.

This state of chronic depression of spirits and morbid sensibility attended by deranged digestion, which is so intractable as regards its treatment by medicines, is nevertheless amenable to change of climate, and has been thus successfully dealt with for many centuries. The observation of the old physician who wrote on this subject upwards of 300 years ago, is still applicable to invalids of this class. Although our ordinary air be good by nature or art, yet it is not amiss to alter it. There is indeed no better physic for a melancholy man than travel, change of air, and variety of places.

In this disease the moral effects of travelling are not less marked than the physical, and both often result in a cure, after the ordinary resources of physic have been in vain exhausted. The primary action of "change of air" seems to consist in the improvement of the digestive functions, and is soon followed by a diminution of the nervous irritability.

The hypochondriacal invalid, who at home has probably been long accustomed to the anxious attentions of his family, or the patient services of his domestics, is, we will say, sent abroad at a mature age, for the first time, for change of climate, to a country of the language of which he is perfectly ignorant. On landing he goes to an hotel, where he is regarded as any other guest that pays his bill, and missing his accustomed comforts he fancies himself neglected. This might at first be considered an unfavourable position for such a person, but in reality it is the best that could be desired. For though usually the patient, at first, uses abuse and threats freely, or even resorts to blows, as I once saw an English valetudinarian do, with a Spanish servant, who in reply produced his albacete knife, and extorted an ample public

apology for the insult; finding these means useless, the hypochondriac will perforce be obliged to curb his temper, and a more equable state of mind will thus gradually become habitual; while, at the same time, the attention of the patient will, by the change of scene, and the thoughts which the varieties of places and manners must occasion, be taken off for the time from their concentration on his own fancied, or even real, ailments.

In hypochondriasis, constant travelling for a few months will generally be found far more serviceable than a prolonged residence in any one place. It matters little where the tour be made, so that a complete change be accomplished; and, therefore, the further we remove from England the better.

A dry, bracing climate is that which is indicated, and a warm, humid atmosphere would in most cases be most prejudicial. In summer a tour in Switzerland or up the Rhine, may be tried with great prospect of success; and in winter the South of France, from Montpellier to Nice, or Italy, avoiding Pisa and Rome. In this complaint Naples is perhaps the best residence in Italy for a short time in winter or part of spring.

—Madden, Thomas M.: *On Change of Climate, A Guide for Travellers in Pursuit of Health.*  
London, Newby, 1864, pp. 56-58.